



Royal Commission
into Aged Care Quality and Safety

SERVICE PROVIDER SURVEY: FINAL SUBSTANDARD CARE AND COMPLAINT DATA RESULTS

December 2020

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety was established by Letters Patent on 8 October 2018. Replacement Letters Patent were issued on 6 December 2018, and amended on 13 September 2019 and 25 June 2020.

The Honourable Tony Pagone QC and Ms Lynelle Briggs AO have been appointed as Royal Commissioners. They are required to provide a final report by 26 February 2021.

The Royal Commission releases consultation, research and background papers. This paper has been prepared by the Office of the Royal Commission for the information of Commissioners and the public. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily the views of the Commissioners.

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Executive summary

- This report summarises the data collected through the Royal Commission's Service Provider Survey for the 81% of residential care providers that responded, covering 93% of facilities active at June 2018. The response rates for other types of providers (Home Care – 39%, Multi-Purpose Services – 61%, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program providers – 23%) were low and the data for these providers is not considered sufficiently representative.
- Residential care providers reported 272,546 occasions of substandard care, and 77,867 complaints about occasions of substandard care. Clinical care, medication management, personal care, dignity, choice and control, and nutrition emerge as the most frequent issues.
- Rates of substandard care and complaints per resident were much higher among for-profit providers than not-for-profit or government providers.

Background

In November 2018 the Royal Commission sent a letter to all aged care providers inviting them to complete a Service Provider Survey.¹ The survey sought data for each facility or outlet operated by the providers, and asked a series of questions to draw their ideas about how the aged care system can be improved.

This report summarises the substandard care data collected through the survey.

The data collected through the survey are:

- Name of the approved provider
- Name of the service or outlet
- Service type (residential care, home care, flexible care, etc)
- Service provider type (profit, not-for-profit, government)
- Ownership type (e.g. church, company, charity, etc)
- Number of people receiving services

¹ Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, *Service Provider Survey*, <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/submissions/Pages/service-provider-survey.aspx>.

- Number of full-time equivalent direct care staff at 30 June 2018, split by occupation
 - nurse practitioner
 - registered nurse
 - enrolled nurse
 - personal/community care worker
 - allied health professional
 - allied health assistant
 - other
- Number of people receiving services at 30 June 2018, split by age group (under 20, 21–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51–60, and 61–65)
- Numbers of occasions of substandard care, split by area of care and year (past 5 years).
- Numbers of complaints, split by type of complaint and year (past five years)

Consolidating the data from the survey has been extremely resource intensive because data items were received in many non-standardised formats. The data was spread across 4902 PDF documents and 2161 Excel spreadsheets. The extraction from these files was done over a period of around five months using a combination of automated processes (writing Microsoft Visual Basic programs) and manual effort (data entry and copy/pasting).

Data quality issues

Despite the value of this data, it is important to understand it has serious issues which make it less reliable and representative of the aged care sector than would be hoped.

Response rate

A total of 1050 approved aged care providers responded to the survey. Residential care was the only sub-sector with a decent response rate. The responses cover 81% of residential care providers active at 30 November 2018 and 93% of the facilities active in June 2018².

The responses also included 39% of home care providers, 61% of Multi-Purpose Services and 23% of National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

² Sourced from Department of Health and reported by AIHW.

Flexible Aged Care Program providers who were active at 30 November 2018. In addition to these low or very low response rates, in many cases the survey responses from these sub-sectors were not able to be matched to public listings of aged care providers, facilities or outlets.

Because of these problems, only the data for residential care is considered to be sufficiently representative of the sector overall to be worth studying and presenting in this report.

Inconsistent reporting

In extracting data a number of further observations were made that highlight the data was reported inconsistently from one provider to another

The instructions for the survey were not always followed and the level of detail and the quality of information varied between providers. In particular, the definition of substandard care varied significantly: providers were told to apply the Australian quality standards however these standards can be very open to individual judgement. For example, one provider reported a total of 92,165 occasions of substandard care over the five year period and included matters such as 'resident's friend unhappy with how he was informed of resident's passing'. In comparison another provider reported a total of 5720 incidents of substandard care over the five year period. These two providers operated a similar number of residential aged care services.

Larger providers typically were more comprehensive in their response than smaller providers. This may reflect that smaller providers did not have adequate resources or records management systems to address the survey.

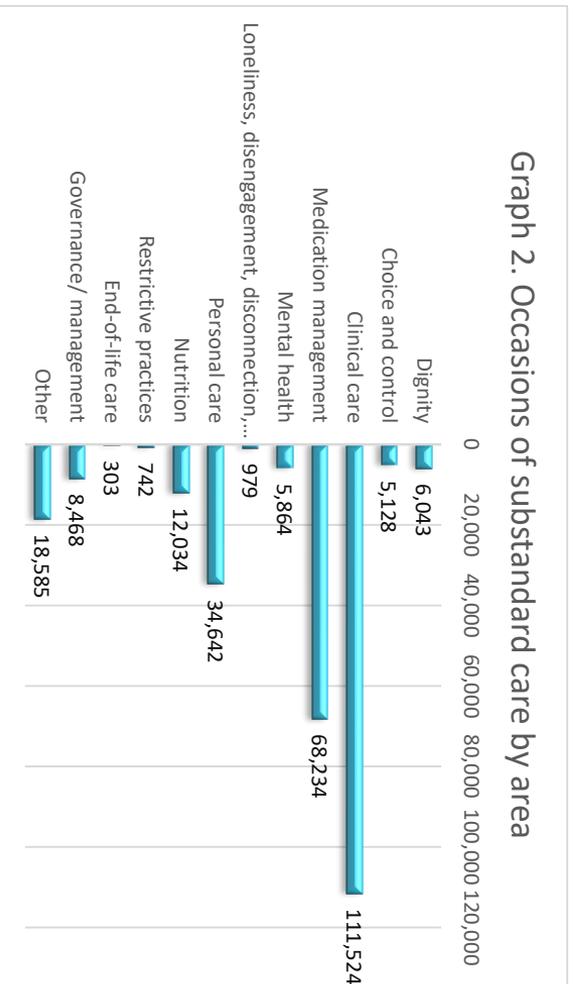
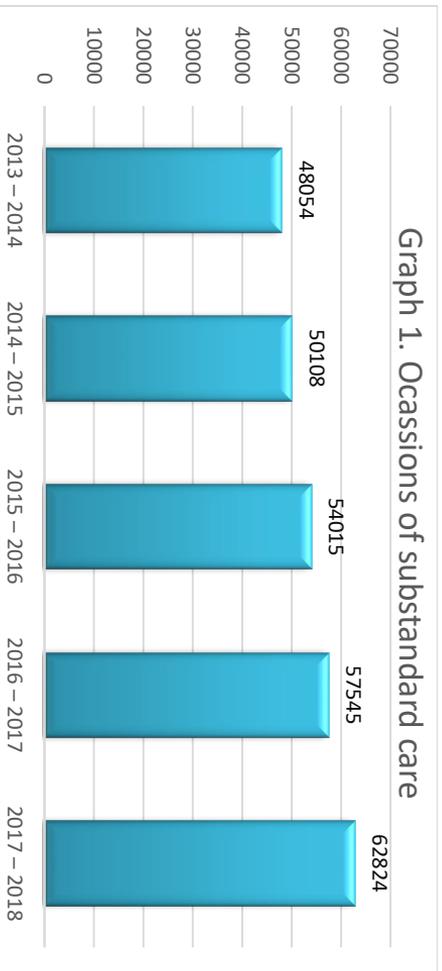
The reporting of different types of substandard care and complaints varied considerably. Medication and falls were the most commonly reported areas, suggesting the providers reporting systems are clinical, rather than quality of life focussed.

The majority of responses provided minimal details about the occasions of substandard care, which may be due to nervousness about volunteering details to the Royal Commission, or may come back to limited resources and records management system capability.

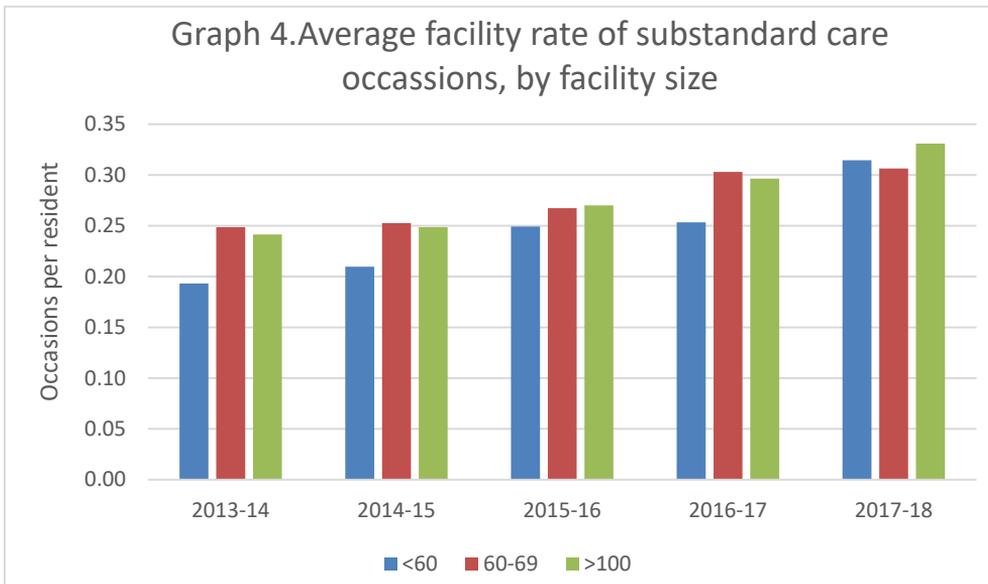
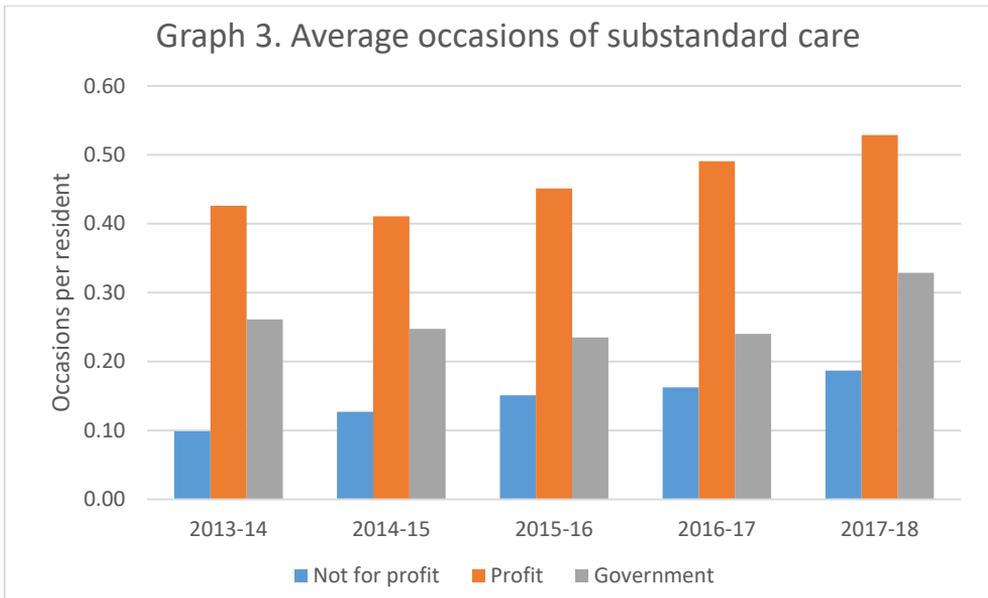
Some of the providers submitted a combined response for all their services (no breakdown of data at a facility level). In some cases a combined response included services delivered in more than one state of Australia and combined data for Residential Care and Home Care.

Substandard care

Residential Care providers responding to the Service Provider Survey reported 272,546 occasions of substandard care in the five years to June 2018. The numbers each year progressively increased over that timespan as shown in Graph 1. It is important to understand that the way this data was supplied is that a single 'event' can fall into multiple areas of substandard care. The totals therefore reflect number of occurrences across different areas of care rather than number of individual substandard care events. In Graph 2, clinical care and medication management were the most common areas of substandard care captured by a large margin.



Graphs 3 and 4 show the rates of substandard care per resident by the different types of service providers and facility sizes. The for-profit facilities have consistently had much higher rates of substandard care than either the not-for-profit or government facilities (in some years double). Smaller facilities have tended to have slightly lower rates than the medium and large facilities. The rates have trended upward over time for the profit and not-for-profit providers, and also been increasing over time across all facility sizes.



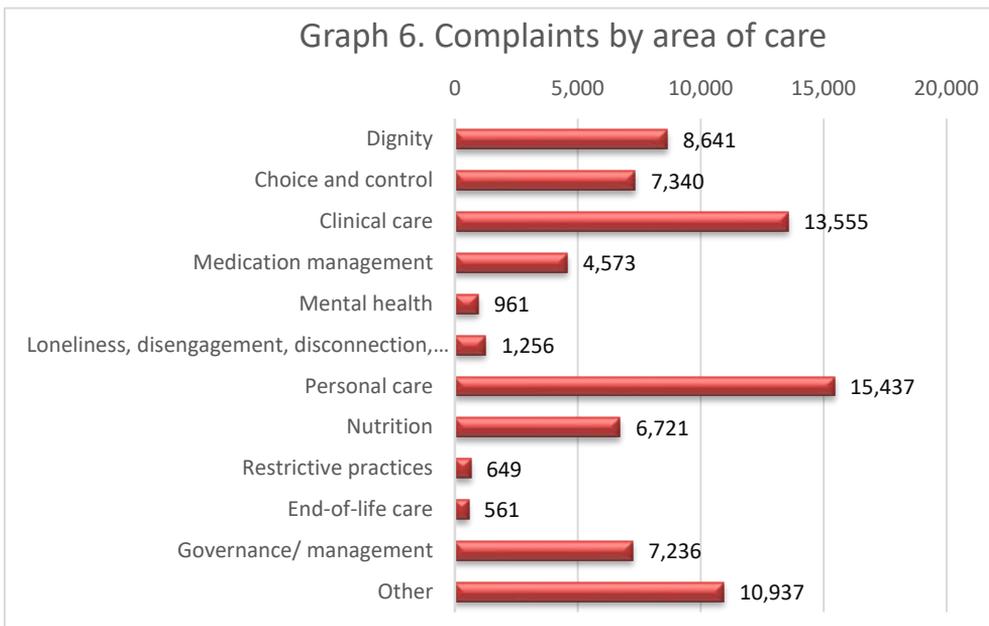
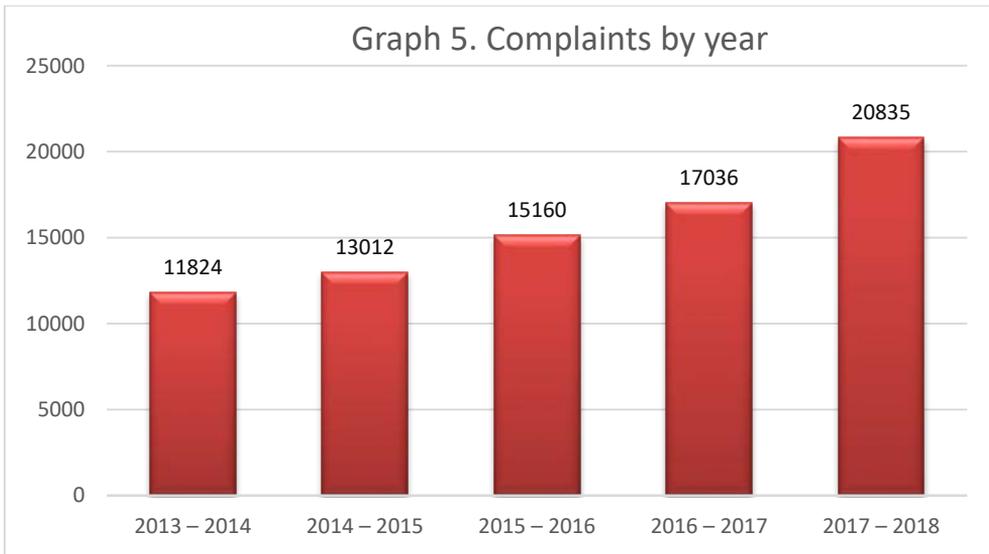
Complaints

Residential Care providers reported 77,867 complaints about substandard care in the five years to June 2018. The number of complaints peaked in 2017-18 at 20,835 complaints. As with the data on occasions of substandard care, a single complaint can fall into more than one area of care.

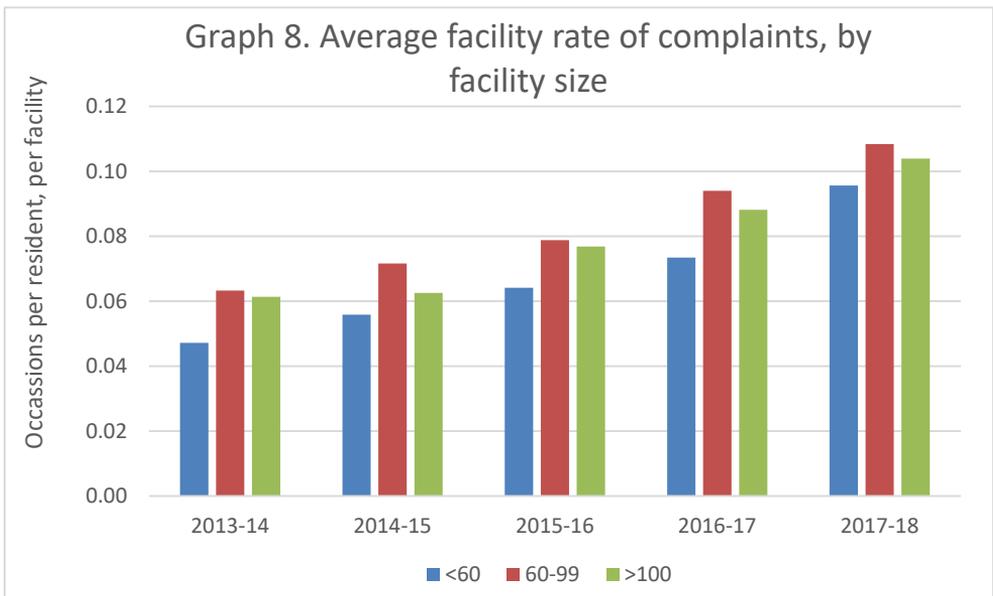
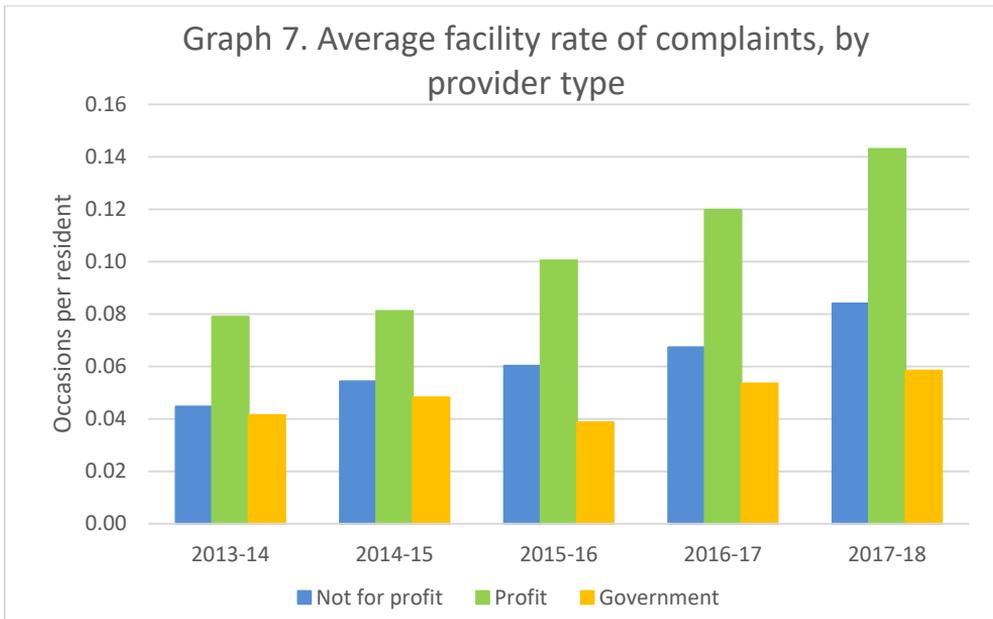
In comparison, the former Aged Care Complaints Commissioner reported that a total of 13,162 complaint issues were received for all aged care service types in 2017-18.³ A similar pattern was observed in 2016-17, with the number of complaint issues reported to the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner for all aged care types lower than the number of residential care complaints reported in the Service Provider Survey. Such differences raise questions about the former Aged Care Complaints Commissioner and now Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's level of visibility to the issues and concerns of aged care residents.

Graphs 5 and 6 show the numbers of complaints by year and by the different areas of care. Like in the substandard care occasions data, complaints have been increasing every year, and clinical care is one of the main areas raised. The most common area of complaint is personal care, which ranks third highest in the substandard care data. Complaints about dignity and choice and control appear more frequently than the previous graphs about substandard care would suggest, possibly indicating that facilities do not treat these issues as seriously as the residents.

³ Aged Care Complaints Commissioner, *Annual Report 2017-18*, 2018, p22, <https://www.agedcarequality.gov.au/sites/default/files/media/Aged%20Care%20Complaints%20Commissioner%20%E2%80%93%20Annual%20Report%202017%E2%80%9318.pdf>, viewed 17 November 2020.



Graphs 7 and 8 show the rates of complaints per resident by the different types of service providers and facility sizes. As with substandard care, the for-profit facilities have much higher rates of complaints than either the not-for-profit or government facilities. The rates of complaints are also higher among the medium and large facilities.



Highest and lowest reports made by large residential care providers

Tables 1 and 2 below show the highest and lowest occasions of substandard care and complaints reported over the five year period from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2018 by large residential service providers. For the purposes of this exercise 'large residential service providers' are defined as those with more than 1,000 residents. These figures are expressed as an average based on the number of residents who received care at 30 June 2018.

As some of these results are so large they may be either inaccurate or reflect providers reporting on a very different basis to other providers.

Table 1: Highest and lowest occasions of substandard care reported by large residential care providers, expressed as an average per resident

Highest occasions per resident	Lowest occasions per resident
15.1916	0.0127
8.9909	0.0428
1.5839	0.0617
1.4195	0.0639
1.0548	0.0663

Table 2: Highest and lowest numbers of complaints reported by large residential care providers, expressed as an average per resident

Highest complaints per resident	Lowest complaints per resident
1.3132	0.0431
1.1881	0.0479
1.1674	0.0481
1.0967	0.0488
0.6251	0.0538